

# The Locket

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Summary: NEW CHAPTER UP At long last, the day of the big field trip and Laura's paired up with someone unexpected for the day...

RobertoxLaura or TravisxLaura? Read and you decide.

## 1. The Locket

Disclaimer: No, I do not own any of the characters in this story. If you for some reason believed that I did in the first place, then something is seriously wrong here :P.

><br>I thought it would be an interesting twist to write a Hamtaro fanfic without any of the Hamtaro ham-hams involved (no, I do not own them either!). Also, I always thought there was a bit of a love triangle happening between Roberto, Travis and Laura in the series. As far as the piece between Laura and Roberto, it's a bit underemphasized. So ya. You shall see a little of that here X3.

As far as being a person x person fic, this doesn't exactly lean towards anyone being paired up. Okie, maybe it goes a little towards two of the people. But I guess you could say it's mainly up to the reader to decide on that for the moment, ne? Because I'm not about to tell you who it is! evil laughter

>note: This is my first fanfic EVER, so please excuse it's cruddiness.<br>Now, on with the story :D.

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It was on a sunny, autumn day that Laura Haruno leaned against the windowsill of the elementary school, watching the soccer team playing below on the field. There had been extra practices lately; with the gradeschools championship coming up -despite the early timing in the year- , not one person seemed short of obsessed with improving to their best for the matches. Even those not on the teams, fellow schoolmates, were getting into the spirit. Conversation on the



schoolground generally revolved around the sport.

><br>Laura sighed. Travis and Roberto had gotten into an argument again. Standing at the far end of the field, fists balled and mouths moving in words mute to her at this distance. Though, she could figure out the basic topic; Stop hogging the ball, don't be such a team hero, quit fumbling half the time. It was a pity. Up until now, their attitudes towards each other had been fairly well mannered. Now, the pressure seemed to have reflected on their friendship the most. Though it was mainly Roberto's doing for the most part. Why did he have to be so stubborn and hot headed all the time?

><br>The bell rang, and she started. Lunch was over. In the distance the players moved in small chatting masses towards the school, leaving Roberto and Travis behind to sort out a few more words. Hurrying she slipped back into her seat. She was, after all, supposed to be in for detention. Fortunately the teacher had left for the last ten minutes to check in about something at the office, leaving her free to wander a bit.

>Her timing couldn't have been better. No sooner had she dropped into the chair than Mr.Yoshi stepped back inside. "Ah, good to see you haven't strayed from your seat while I was gone, Laura. I suppose you've thought about your little problem then?" Closing the sliding doors behind him, Mr. Yoshi crossed to his desk.<br>

>She nodded. "Yes, Mr.Yoshi..."<br>

>"Good. Then, from now on I'll be expecting your assignments in fairly earlier than they have been lately." Slowly the class filed in. All conversation was finished off as they entered, and soon the room was silent. The sound of textbooks being opened filled the air instead, and the occasional whisper about the upcoming tournament. Already writing was being scribbled across the board in pasty white chalk.<br>

>Laura yawned. The class was warm in the spring heat, and spending the whole lunch hour in the room was starting to take it's effect on her. She slumped, head balanced on the palm of one hand. Eyes strayed from the board and around the classroom. Travis was still missing...That was odd.<p>

It was only a few minutes into class when one of the students sitting in a window seat arose, their hand on the windowsill. It was Kana, Laura's best friend. They had been close as sisters since she had moved here a year or two ago. At the moment, her eyes were wide with shock as she stared outside.

>"Mr.Yoshi,  
look!"<p>

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><br>Children rose and pooled by the windows. Laura, with her desk off to the other side of the room, was one of the last to cross to the window. Kana grabbed her and pulled her in through the small crowd.

>"Look!" She pointed across the green lawn.<p>

A mild scene of chaos had broken out on the field. Children cheered and chanted as a pile of dust kicked

>up, caused by - you guessed it - Travis and Roberto. Fists flew as they rolled about on the ground, each attempting to gain the upper hand. Even from this distance, she could see the expressions on their faces. A small circle of students had crowded around them. Neither looked game to give in.<p>



Taking one glance out the window, Mr.Yoshi turned somewhat pale and ran from the room. Several of the other students by the window began to shout out words of encouragement to either of the sparring soccer players. Mainly Travis. Even though at the moment Roberto seemed to have the upper hand. Laura bit her lip. She would have willingly cheered Travis on, but she knew what that might look like...

Her cheeks turned a pale pink at the thought. She had never given up her crush on him; and at the moment, she wasn't ready to let anyone in on her little secret. Not that she was alone on her feelings. Travis, being both good-natured and good-looking, had a fair amount of the elementary girls in the palm of his hand. And without him even noticing it at that.

><br>Mr.Yoshi wasn't the first teacher to reach the scene. Apparently they hadn't been the only class window gazing. With the excitement broken up, most of the class returned to the seats. A few moments later the teacher returned. He looked slightly red-faced, but otherwise fine.

"Okay, children, continue copying your notes." The scribbling of chalk on the board continued. However the class chatter didn't stop. It seemed at the moment nobody's minds were on work. Laura ducked her head, and continued to 'write notes'; however, ears strained to listen in on some of the conversation.

"I heard that this time, they were going to get phone calls home." Someone whispered, voice raised a little too loud. Mr.Yoshis hand froze on the board, in the middle of writing math equations.

"Now, children, I don't want to hear any more about -"

The door creaked open. Heads turned to watch as the two boys stepped in. Bumping shoulders somewhat roughly in the doorway, Roberto turned out entering first closely followed by a rather surly-looking Travis. Neither looked too happy. Stupid Roberto; thanks to him shooting off his mouth, they were both probably going to get in trouble with not only the coach, but their teachers and parents now.

No words were exchanged as they took their seats. Apparently nobody was too game to directly confront either of them about the fight in the middle of class. They would be mobbed with questions later, most likely. But at the moment the room was deathly silent.

><br>Sighing Laura returned to her notebook. Maybe she could gather up the courage to ask Travis about the argument herself. If not that, at least about his soccer practices and how they were going. She smiled to herself. No, he wouldn't mind that..

>Neither would  
she.<p>

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><br>It was another sunny day. A few fluffy clouds dotted the sky. However, Laura seemed far from noticing. She fiddled nervously with her hair ribbons as she entered the soccer field that afternoon, only a day or so after the day of the fight. She hadn't exactly bothered to dress up or anything like that; moreso what she liked to call 'dressing for the occasion'. After all, she didn't want Travis to think she was some tomboy, right? She wore instead of her usual shirt



a pale violet tank top, patterned with small blue roses around the edge. She had been debating wearing her pink one, but in the end decided it looked a bit too girly. Her hair was tied up with a deep purple ribbon, too. Tightening one of the bows she glanced around nervously. Travis was nowhere in sight. But Roberto was there. Kicking the ball from knee to head, without it ever touching the ground. Typical. What a show-off. Too bad there wasn't much of an audience for him to show off to.

"Roberto?" She called out. He stumbled, kicking the ball at an awkward angle directly from his knee into his forehead and leaving it free to bounce off down the field. He muttered something under his breath. With a hand to his sore forehead he faced her.

"What?!"

"Geez, no need to get all snappish okay? It was just an accident..." She took a step back. If anything, he looked more tense than normal. A bead of sweat rolled down the side of his face, and it occurred to her how hard he must have been practising lately. Not only to keep ahead of everyone else (as he always seemed to act like he was), but because he seemed to have such an uncanny obsession with soccer. For a moment she almost felt sorry for him.

"Well \_sorry\_ for telling someone off for sneaking up behind me and make me screw up!"

>Okay, so much for feeling sorry for him. She glared.<p>

"Sneaking? I was in plain sight, you bimbo! If you weren't so big-headed and narrow-minded that you can't even look up from the ball every once in a while, you might have realized that!"

He seemed about to retort but stopped. Eyes gave her a quick glance up and down. "What are you dressing up for, anyways? Meeting with your little club of friends or something?" Turning he went to fetch the ball, as it finally rolled to a stop some few metres away.

><br>She flushed. Was it that obvious that she had dressed up? She quickly pulled out the hair ribbons. "I'm not dressing up, mister big shot. It's a thing called 'dressing decently'. Though I doubt you've ever heard of it.." She passed him and headed for the dugout. "By the way... Have you seen Travis around?"

><br>"Travis? What would you want with \_him\_?"

><br>She could tell from the tone of his voice she had hit a nerve.

"Well, I just wanted to... Talk. You know. See how his training's going." Her ears grew hot. She turned to see him pick up the ball. If he had been annoyed before, it was nothing compared to now.

><br>"Figures... Another one of his fan club." He sighed. "He's over by the bleachers... Taking a 'break'." He snorted, as if anyone who needed more than a few seconds rest was completely insane.  
"Later."

She could practically feel his eyes burning into the back of her head as she walked off. What was his deal? He was so jealous of Travis. Then again, she couldn't blame him. Travis was the one who did any good for the team. Travis was the one who had all of the friends.

>Travis was the one everyone liked.<br>



>Reaching the stands, she looked around. Travis was nowhere in sight. Had Roberto just been pulling her leg? No. She stepped onto the white bleachers, climbing a few levels. Travis's things were there; His towel, a water bottle and a soccer ball. But where was <em>Travis</em>? She sat with a sigh, dropping her chin into her hands. Well, this was turning out differently than she had expected. Instead of meeting up with Travis, she found herself dressing up for the last person she would have wanted to see...

><br>"Laura?" She jumped, and glanced off to her far right. Travis was walking along one of the wooden planks. She never ceased to be amazed, about how he could balance so effortlessly at such a height. Even looking tired from practice, he was...cute. Even with his hair messed up from running laps and doing drills. She felt her ears go slightly pink again, and rose to her feet.

"Oh, Travis! I was wondering where you were." She gave a small laugh, forcing a smile. He smiled back.

>"I was just wondering how your soccer practice's been going.." "Not exactly great, but I can't complain." He sat down, reaching for the water bottle and popping off the top. "At least, not with says that the next time we get in a fight, we're both kicked off the team for the tournament. Maybe even the year." Lips thinned. "Though, we've been avoiding each other lately. I think we'll be able to make it. As long as he doesn't hog the ball so much in the game.." Eyes trailed down to the field, where Roberto was back to kicking the ball around. Every once in a while he would throw them a curious glance, as if wondering what they were talking about in the first place. "That, and as long as he doesn't try to play hero."<br>

>"Well, I'm sure you'll do fine. " She smiled again. "I mean, you don't even need Roberto after all. Our school team did fine before he even moved here in the first place, right?"<br>

>"Yeah..." He nodded absent-mindedly. Though, by the expression on his face he wasn't thinking what she was.<p>

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><br>Laura had noticed as she left the bleachers that afternoon, the glances exchanged between Travis and Roberto. She hadn't thought much of it. Not until the next morning. It was Monday. Entering the classroom, she knew immediately there was something in the air. The usual class buzz had elevated to excited chattering, like a hive of angry bees.

"Did you hear, Laura?" Kylie, another friend of hers, ran over closely followed by Kana and June. It was hard to tell which one seemed the most excited; Kana looked more nervous than anything.

"No...What?"

><br>"Travis and Roberto got in another fight!" June exclaimed.

"Well, that's the rumor at least. They're saying it wasn't on school hours, so...But you should see them! Something had to have happened!"

><br>It was Laura's turn to look anxious now. "Another fight? But...But if they did....Oh, no..." Travis's words echoed through her mind. \_Coach says that the next time we get in a fight, we're both kicked off the team for the tournament. Maybe even the year..

\_"Where's Travis? I need to talk to him!"



Kana shrugged. "No one really knows at the moment... He left this morning as soon as people starting to ask him about his bruises. But..." She indicated across the room. "Roberto's over there, if you wanted to talk to him."

><br>Laura hesitated. She wasn't exactly game to chat with Roberto. However, her curiosity overcame her. As she passed her, Kana grabbed Laura's arm.

"Er..Laura? Can I talk to you in a little? It's important.."

><br>"Sure, I'll just be a sec." Shrugging Kana's arm off, she crossed the room. A small crowd had gathered around poor Roberto, who oddly seemed to be handling them quite well. Even from a distance she could see the damage. One of his eyes had a large bruise over it, and she could have sworn she saw a flash of a cut on his lip as he talked. This was by far the worst he had looked yet. Watching him finally disentangle from the crowd, she followed him out into the hallway to the fountain.

><br>After glancing over his shoulder a few times, he finally turned and faced her. "What..?" He questioned, slowly. There was a hint of sarcasm in his voice, but at the same time he sounded a bit curious. "You want to take a picture or something?"

"No!" She started, already feeling her temper begin to rise. However, she forced it down. Why did this always happen? "I just...Wanted to know...Travis told me that.. Well, if you got in another fight-"

"-That we'd be kicked off the team." He finished the sentence for her. Leaning he went to take a sip from the fountain, only succeeding in spraying himself in the face. Leaning back up he wiped the water away and muttered something under his breath.

"It doesn't matter." He said. He seemed to have noticed Laura's expression. "Because we \_aren't \_going to be getting into any more fights."

><br>"But-"

><br>"I didn't get this from him." He said, pointing to the eye. His voice lowered slightly. "Well, at least not as far as coach is ever going to know... The same goes for anyone else. As long as Travis doesn't rat on us, we can still hold in there." Wiping his mouth, he turned and headed back to class. Leaving Laura standing there, wondering exactly how they were going to pull this off.

><br>Then she remembered Kana. Returning to class, she met her walking out the doorway.

>"Laura! Come here..."Glancing around as if to make sure they weren't being watched, she led her over to her bookbag and pulled out a small, crimson gift box.<p>

"...I got to class early today, and it was on your desk." she said, face turning a fair shade of pink as she passed it to her. "I knew Kylie and June would make a big deal out of it if they saw it, so I hid it in my bookbag. I hope it isn't broken or anything.."

Laura glanced down at the package. The box itself was shiny, with small flowers engraved into the papery material. There was a small card hanging off the edge; the end sealed with a thin strip of tape ("don't worry, I didn't open it" Kana reassured.). Opening it, she found a small piece of writing inside.



\_To Laura

>Hoping this will make you day a little better.<br>

>Someone who cares<br>

><em>She turned the card over. Nothing else.

>"Well, are you going to open it?" Kana questioned. She did, and found a small silver locket inside strung on a blue ribbon. The locket itself was oval, pointed at the top. "Hey, it looks a bit like a sunflower seed! Maybe Hamtaro sent it?" Kana commented, giggling.<br>

>Hearing a sound, Laura glanced up in time to spot Travis falling to his knees, picking up the text book he had dropped. He glanced up moment. For a brief second, their eyes met. Then he glanced away, once again preoccupied with gathering some last few stray papers.<p>

She turned the locket over, and opened it up. It was empty. A secret admirer... Or was it? Again she glanced to Travis, already being mobbed by several classmates, and was unable to keep from wondering..

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><br>A few days later the weather turned somewhat foul outside. Rain battered the windows, gusts of wind made the trees dance and sway. The temperature wasn't much better, either; it was easily cold enough that the rain could have very well been hail.

The worst part was that, bad weather or no bad weather, Brandy still needed to be let outside to do his business. Laura had barely opened the door when he toddled out past her, nearly being knocked off his feet by a particularly fierce gust of wind. Grabbing an umbrella and her bright yellow rain coat she followed him out into the storm.

><br>Feet sunk into the moist earth. A car raced past, spraying up a large torrent of rainwater. She turned her back to it but was still unable to protect against a partial soaking. Great. What next... Thunder? As if answering her question, a flash of lightning crossed the sky in the distance.

Brandy toddled across the lawn, and turned the corner. What was he doing? She followed out onto the sidewalk. Her question was soon answered...Some distance away a figure stood by the road. The downpour made it impossible to see who it was, but they looked no taller than someone her age.

><br>Either way Brandy looked pleased to see them. Trotting over, he licked the outstretched hand as it reached for him. \_

><em>

"Brandy? Come here boy!" She called out but he didn't move. Taking a few steps closer, she finally recognized the red hair and blue eyes; Partially obscured beneath a large, blue raincoat. "Roberto? What are you doing out in this weather?"

He glanced up. For a second he looked almost startled. "...I like the rain. So what?" He kneeled, stroking Brandy's already rain-drenched head.



"Leave him alone! Brandy, come!" Still Brandy didn't move. Muttering something under her breath, she walked over to grab him by the collar.

><br>Roberto looked up. "Geez, what's your problem? You're acting like he might catch some sort of terrible disease or something..."

"For all I know, he might." She mumbled a bit too loudly. She didn't really care. She was cold, she was wet, and she was grumpy. Fumbling a moment she finally snapped the leash around his collar. "There you go...Now come on. Time to go home."

Roberto rose. He looked almost hurt at her reaction. Arms hung limp at his sides. Then, he said something that surprised- and even confused- her a little. "You know, Laura...That's the big problem with you. You judge people by first impressions, and then that's all they are to you."

><br>"What are you talking about? I'm nothing like that!"

><br>"Oh yeah? From the second I met you, just because I snapped a little I've always 'just so happened' to get on your bad side every time we so much as cross paths. Even when I try to be nice, you treat me like the big bad wolf that is trying to steal away your perfect little life. I so much as say hi, you bite my head off! I could probably give you a million dollars and your first question would be 'how many banks did you have to rob to get this?' And then there's prettyboy Travis that you're always drooling over..."

><br>She swelled at this comment. "I do not- how dare you say something like that!"

><br>Eyebrows rose slightly, as if amused by this reaction. "Come off it... It's not as if half the class doesn't know it by now. Oh, don't worry," He put in quickly, as she began to move forward, "I mean- it's not like you're alone on that one. Half the school's girls spend most their time drooling over him at the games, cheering him on and each trying to get his attention. To tell the truth, I doubt he can tell you apart from the rest of the crowd.."

><br>She glanced to the sidewalk a moment. Of course, probably half of what he had just said was true - the stuff about Travis that was. Rarely could she go a day in school without catching sight of him being mobbed by a few female classmates, asking him to sit with them at lunch or teach them a few soccer moves. Even some of the older girls from the next grade up confronted him at times. He had to be the most popular guy in school...

A light blinked on in her head. Of course, why hadn't she thought of it before. She dug inside her raincoat, reaching around her neck. "Doesn't recognize me from the rest of the crowd, huh? Then why-" She pulled out the small, sunflower-seed shaped locket, "-Would he give me this?"

><br>Roberto's reaction was interesting, to say the least. He took one glance at the locket. Eyebrows rose, and his expression suggested he had just been passed a particularly bad test mark. Then, he looked up at her. "Did it say it was from him?" He challenged. This she hadn't been ready for. Her face went red again, as she tucked it away.

>"Well- no, of course not. But I know he gave it to me-"<br>

>"How?"<br>

>"Be-..Because he did, alright!? Who else would have, you stupid



jerk!?" Her voice was rising, and it took her a second to realize how close she was getting to explode at him. Roberto's mouth opened slightly, like a fish out of water. Then, his face turned almost as red as she was sure hers was. Voice turned low and calm, and a small but cruel smirk crossed his face.<p>

"I don't know... Perhaps he's better at practical jokes than I thought, huh?"

><br>She barely remembered what happened next. Only moving forward, and her hand whipping past her. The sound seemed to echo through the rain. They stood, frozen a moment, unmoving statues in the rain. Then he took a step back, face to the side, hand rising to his cheek. Eyes were wide with surprise.

><br>Several phrases came from her mouth that she didn't quite care to repeat. They mixed with his words, coming out equally as fast and unpleasant as her own. She was surprised her parents hadn't heard from indoors.

><br>"You idiot! Can't you just accept the fact that something good is finally happening to me and you can't do anything about it!? Even I didn't think you were that wicked!"

><br>"I never said I was against that! You just have to be so ignorant, and big headed! You actually think he's been bothering to give you a second glance all of this time, and put you on a pillar above the rest of the crowd!"

"I can't believe you! You really are out to ruin everything good that happens to me, aren't you!? First nearly getting Travis kicked off the team, and now being an idiot about this locket-"

><br>"This locket, this locket, is that all you can say!? I wish-"

><br>What he said next, she wished she could have taken back for both of their sakes. He stepped back a moment, seeming to be thinking exactly the same thing she was. Then he turned his back to her and disappeared down the street, leaving her standing to slowly let the rain soak through her coat.

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><br>She was surprised her parents didn't notice her slam the door as she came inside. Dropping the rain-soaked jacket by the door, she ran up to her room and closed the door.

The rain still pounded heavily against the windows. Pulling the locket out from under her shirt, she ripped the string off her neck and tossed it into the small garbage can by her desk. Suddenly, it didn't seem like such a lovely gift anymore... Roberto's words rung in her head still. Especially, those he had said last..

>"I wish I never sent you that stupid locket in the first place!"<p>

She sighed. He had to have been joking...Hadn't he? She knew Roberto; He would be too stubborn. Come to think of it...She couldn't even imagine him liking someone in the first place. She flopped back on the bed. But of all people...Why did it have to even possibly be him? Anyone else, she could have taken. Just not him...

Eyes snapped open and she sat up. Well, she still hadn't written in her diary yet. She could do that now. Considering she had some steam



to blow off, why not? The lined paper rose to her eyes, and she began to write.

><br>\_Dear diary,

><br>I can't believe how unreal this week has been! Travis and Roberto are putting up an effort to get along, but it doesn't seem to be working too well...

><br>\_Her stomach churned at the mention of their names. Still, she continued to write.\_ Also, guess who has a secret admiror? Yours truly! Though...Roberto said he sent it to me. Can you believe him? What a fibber... I wish he would just move or something, make everyone happier. I think he was just doing it to take Travis out of the spotlight.

><br>\_She smiled at this thought. It was slightly comforting. After all, it sounded like something Roberto could do.

><br>\_Oh, and guess what! The soccer tournament starts tomorrow! Me and Kana are dressing in the school colors and are going to cheer them on during the match. I hope they enjoy the support! (I'm planning on throwing in an extra cheer for Travis!)

><br>All in all, it hasn't been a wonderful day today. But tomorrow should be amazing!

><br>\_Laura closed the diary. That felt good...And now that she thought about it, tomorrow was definitely something to look forward to.

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><br>Looking at the blue, cloudless sky of the next morning, you would never have guessed the weather from the day before. Laura and her friends had grabbed good seats. They were dead center, near the front. She couldn't believe their luck; then again, they had arrived half an hour early to watch the teams practice. It had been fun to watch. The team had improved noticeably; their extra practices had really paid off. Laura had been careful to avoid Roberto's eyes, off to the side practicing lifting and playing with a few others. Every once in a while, she was sure she could feel his eyes on her all the same.

><br>Now, with the bleachers full Kana and her had finished up the last few pieces to their costumes. Their hair was up in matching pigtails, tied with large blue and white scrunchies. They matched their tops as well, along with white shorts. The school colors.

><br>"Do you think anyone will notice?" Kana questioned with a nervous laugh.

><br>"That's the point, isn't it?" Already, several people had given them odd glances. Laura laughed at the expression on her friend's face. "Don't worry, alright? You look fine."

><br>Kana sighed. "Fine. If you say so..."

><br>A whistle sounded, and the game began. Already cheers rung out from the crowd to mingle with the noise on the field. Within a few minutes, the ball was in Travis's hands. He kicked - from a fair distance, not to mention - , and scored the game's first goal. Laura jumped up and cupped her hands over her mouth.

>"Go Travis! Who-" As usual at any practice or game, however, her calls were drowned out by the roar of the crowd.<p>

It was a few minutes later they realized they weren't the only people prepared to cheer the team on. A few rows back, some fourth-graders stumbled slightly under the weight of a large hand-painted banner, which they raised at random intervals. Another pair, somewhat older,



had painted their faces with the school colors. Several people, like them, wore the team colors - blue and white dotted the crowd.

Some yells pursued, followed by a whistle and a series of groans from the opposing crowd. A group of players had taken a nasty spill. Arms and legs stuck out from the tangled mass. However it was obvious one of their own players had taken the worst; jammed right at the bottom, he could only groan as the others got off of him. A quick break was called as the coach jogged out onto the field. Most of the spectators flopped back down onto the bench with a swell of small sighs. This could take a while...

><br>"Hey, Laura! Look..." Kana had been shaking Laura's shoulder, and now her hand was raised and pointing across the field. "Please don't tell me - If they start this up now - ... Boys always have the worst timing..." Arm drew back, and she clutched her hands together nervously.

><br>Laura glanced up from the enter of the field. Travis and Roberto were off to one corner; She didn't need to see their expressions to know they were arguing (again). Anxiously, she glanced down to the coach. He was still preoccupied, hovering around the fallen player and randomly calling off suggestions to the other teams coach -who, at the moment, seemed to be finding his suggestions more of a hindrance than help. "What should we do?" She questioned.

><br>Kana sat a moment, biting her lip and evidently thinking the same thing. Then she rose from her seat. Hands cupped around her mouth. Her voice seemed magnified, ringing out over the near mute buzz of the crowd.

"Travis!!!Roberto!!!" She yelled. It was a cheer. She repeated, and soon Laura joined in. A few people seemed confused at first. Then, slowly, they joined in on the chant. It was hard to tell whether Roberto really did have a few fans out there, or Travis's name seemed to work people into a frenzy. Most likely the fun of yelling was just too addictive to resist. Either way, they soon had the whole set of bleachers in an uproar.

"TRAVIS!!! ROBERTO!!! TRAVIS!!! ROBERTO!!!"

><br>That definitely got their attention. They turned, startled at first before muttering a few things to each other and heading back to the team. Travis gave a half-friendly smile, whereas Roberto glanced off to the side and gave a somewhat agreeing nod.

Laura looked at Kana. A look of mild surprise on her face.

>"How did you come up with that?"<p>

Kana smiled. "Well, would you expect them to do anything when they thought the whole crowd's eyes were on them? With that much attention, I knew they wouldn't."

><br>The game finally resumed. The final score was - unsurprisingly - 9 home, 3 visitors. Laura and Kana soon after found themselves caught up in a swell of chattering girls, all off to congratulate the team. The players, tired but happy, accepted the kudos and congrats they received with smiles. Mainly poor Travis, of whom was quickly swarmed by a wave of fans in blue and white. Holding up his hands in defence, it took two of his particularly more intimidating friends to hold them off. Then he did something quite unexpected. He looked out over the crowd -straight at Laura-, and began making his way through the swarm towards her.

><br>Kana and Laura exchanged glances, and she felt her face grow hot. He didn't...Really, he couldn't have meant-



><br>But it was. Moments later she heard that familiar voice in her ear, and her legs turned to jell-o.

"Laura?"

She turned and found herself staring the neckline of a dirt-stained soccer jersey. Travis leaned down slightly, enough that they were almost face. He smiled. "Hey. What did you think of the game?"

>Seriously, eyes that brown had to be illegal. She swallowed, and replied in a small voice.<br>"The game? Yeah, you were great - I mean, the team was great! But, you really did good - Not that I was watching you that much or anything...But, I don't mean I was ignoring you either by that! Really, I just...uhm..." What little voice she had remaining left her, and she trailed off awkwardly.

He laughed. This, if anything, made her face turn an even deeper shade of red. "Well, I'm glad that you had fun. Listen..." He turned, notioning towards the door with his head. "You...Wanna go for a walk or something? Any more people come in, and I think we'll have some worse injuries than we had in the game itself..."

><br>It was a miracle they escaped the crowd alive. However, once away from the fray Laura felt her nerves returning. No matter what she just couldn't bring her hands to stop shaking, nor could she force down the hint of pink she felt was in her cheeks as her and Travis circled the path outside the soccer field. There was no stop of talk... on Travis's part, at least. She mainly found herself listening as he went on about school, how the tournament was going and the upcoming match. Soon she realized how much time had passed; most the spectators had left, and only the coach and a few players remained behind. "It's sure going to be a close one, they haven't lost a match as long as we've been on the team.." He finished off, talking about one of their upcoming matches. "Hey- do you think we'll be able to finally show them who's boss this year? Laura?" She felt his hand on her shoulder, and started. It was hard to believe, she had actually began to zone out as he talked to her.

"Sorry...I'm just a little tired, that's all." She sneezed, and realized that she was feeling a little stuffy. Perhaps that walk yesterday was taking it's toll... No, don't think about yesterday. She frowned, trying to take her mind off the fiasco that had happened.

"You don't sound so good..."

She sighed. "Sorry...I was outside a bit yesterday...I guess I'm getting a bit of a cold." She smiled sheepishly.

><br>"Well, you should probably be a little more careful." He commented. "Hey...I was wondering, do you have a computer?"

><br>"Yeah...Well, my dad has one at least. I don't go on all that often-"

><br>"Do you have an e-mail address?"

><br>She glanced up at him. Why would he want her e-mail? She felt her heart skip a beat. "Yeah...Why?"

><br>"What is it?" He questioned. "See, after the tournament dad said we could take a trip to America for a week or two."

><br>"Really? Travis, that's great!"

He grinned. "I know... anyways, I won't be able to talk to many of my



friends while I'm there...So, I'm collecting a few e-mail addresses. That way, we can keep in touch from half way across the world!"

><br>She smiled, and felt a few butterflies stirring in her stomach. "That's a good idea...But I don't have any paper on me or anything..."  
><br>"That's alright. I keep some in my duffel bag back at the field."

A bubble of hope arose in her chest. He'd gone out of his way, to get \_her \_address? It sounded that way..  
>They were crossing the field now, the green grass fairly battered beneath their feet from the game. Most everybody had left now. Only the coach remained, packing up the last of the gear, and a small group of players helping him.<br>  
>"Hey, Travis! Cleared off kind of quick, didn't ya!" The coach called out.<p>

"Sorry, Coach...Had to clear my head. I think the crowd was a bit much." Laura heard a small laugh from the group of remaining students. Roberto was amongst them, head lowered as he tied a bag of soccer balls.  
><br>Laura glanced away. As Travis leaned over his duffel bag, however, a thought struck her.

"Travis...How many addresses do you have so far?" She questioned.

He straightened up. A small notebook in one hand, a red pencil in the other. He flipped past a few pages of what looked like scribbles and messy notes. However, after a moment she realized that they weren't his notes. They were all differently written. Some big and messy, some small and clean. One she was sure she saw was topped with a large, pink doodled heart.

He slowed to a stop, near the very back, counting off the pages of the booklet in his head. Then he passed it over for her to add her address as well. "I'm not sure....About thirty seven so far, I think.."

.....  
.....  
.....

Thirty seven? She jammed his address, a small piece of paper, into her back pocket as she walked home. Tears blurred her eyes...no, she wouldn't cry. How stupid. Getting worked up over something as dumb as an e-mail address, as if he really would have done that? Over and over in her head, images of the addresses he had already aquired flashed through her mind. Her eyes brimmed again, and she tried to take her mind off the thought. Did Kana wait around for her? She should have thought of that before running off with Travis like that..

><br>"Laura!"  
><br>"..." She glanced over her shoulder. Roberto was running up from her left, making his way up the slope that surrounded the field. Great...What did he want? Quickly she wiped her eyes on her sleeve, and turned to face him.  
><br>"Hey...You dropped this." He passed her her small blue scrunchie. Surprised, she felt the side of her head. It was hers.



"Oh...uh, thanks." She replied, feeling slightly stupid. The last time she had seen his face, she had been ready to jam a mudball up his nose. Now, here he was, playing the 'good guy'..

"No problem." He scratched the back of his neck, taking a quick glance down to the field. "Listen...I wanted to apologize for yesterday. I got a little carried away... I shouldn't have yelled at you like that."

>She started. Apologize? Who the heck was this guy? She tied the scrunchy back into her hair, forcing a small laugh. "Don't worry about it.. you don't have to."<br>

>"Yeah..right."He looked slightly relieved. "Hey...are you okay? Your eyes are a bit red.."<p>

"Yeah, I'm fine. I think I'm just getting a cold."

"Oh.. okay." A pause. Then, "Well...I got to go. Later. Say hi to Brandy for me." Turning, he jogged back into the field.

><br>"Bye!" She gave a quick wave. Then, realizing what she was doing, she dropped her hand and continued down the sidewalk. Her eyes were dry now, least. Roberto had managed to make her feel better, instead of worse -for once. She couldn't believe, she had finally managed to talk to him for once without even raising her voice.

><br>At home she flopped onto her bed. Then, she remembered Travis's email address. She took it out, and examined it. In the bottom corner, he had left a small note; \_'wish us luck for the tournament!'. \_Was scrawled out in red, like the rest of the address. Yeah, like that would really make a difference if she did that. Funny... when he wrote his o's, they had a little tail on the top. She sighed, and dropped it on her desk beside the card that came with the locket.

><br>She examined the card again. Roberto couldn't have written he? And what had she done with that dumb locket? She searched around a moment, about to give up when she finally retrieved it from the garbage can. Stupid...All this commotion over a dumb piece of metal. And Roberto. Why did they always end up fighting like cats and dogs? She turned the locket over in her hands. Well, he deserved it most of the time. Like when they met in the soccer field. He yelled at her, and for what? Because he was too zoned out to even notice she was there!

\_Maybe the word you're looking for is 'busy'.. \_She sighed. Okay, so maybe it was her fault for not giving him a warning. But what about yesterday? What if Brandy had been run over by a car? Well, okay, maybe he wasn't that stupid... But then they had been yelling. Though, even she had started that... And then she had slapped him..

><br>All this time, she had been staring absent-mindedly at the locket. Now, she glanced past it to the card. '\_Hoping this will make you day a little better.' \_...Heh.Well, she was still waiting for the 'better' part.. The writing on the card was in blue ink, and surprisingly neat.

Wait... She grabbed the sheet Travis had given her, and compared the two. The o's on the card were slanted, but had no tail like the ones on the small piece of crumpled paper... In fact, most of the spelling was noticeably different. She dropped the card back onto the table. Travis had to have altered his writing for the card. Though, the



thought sounded laughable even in her thoughts.

><br>So...Roberto hadn't been lying? But, just because Travis hadn't written it didn't mean it was from Roberto.. She glanced at the card again. '\_Someone who cares'... \_Well, at least she knew now who it \_wasn't\_ from...So why did she feel so sick? She turned the locket over in her hand. \_Well...It was a gift\_. The latch had been broken when she tore it off, but she tied the blue ribbon around her neck nonetheless. Then she pulled out her diary, and set Travis's address in the front, between the cover page and journal entries. She didn't want to lose it, even if it was 'address #38'..

She flipped to a new page. Pulled out her pen, and sucked on the end a moment, thoughtful. Then she began to write.\_

><br>Dear diary,

>Today was a very... interesting day.<em>

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><br>Blah, sorry for the rather smelly ending X ( . It's my first fanfic, and I guess I got a bit rushed near the finish. Should have added a little more suspense or...something :P. Will there be a continuation? I dunno... Guess that part depends on how many people actually bother to \_read \_this in the first place. Anywhoo, hope you enjoyed reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it :P.

## 2. Suspended

Wow. It's... the continuation??? Ohmygosh! Yeah... this is super late, I know. My bad. And guess what? Laura's still not with Roberto OR Travis. But there's some interesting twists to this one C:. If there are any inconsistencies please let me know... kind of fixing up some parts of this story as I go along, so some things may be a bit wonky.

But anyhowoo. Enjoy the chapter.

\* \* \*

>Rain.<br> Perfect. Just what everyone needed. Most of the audience, noticeably more scarce than the previous matches, was covered in an array of brightly colored umbrellas and raincoats. Nobody bothered to speak, as the sound of rain drumming on the bleachers drowned out most all other sound. Lightning split the sky; it was surprising the match hadn't been called off yet.

And yet it continued. Out on the muddy field, Laura Haruno's school soccer team battled valiantly for a swift victory. But things weren't going their way. Two members had already fallen and been unable to continue. Even Travis, whom usually was full of encouragement for the team, had fallen silent for the moment. Probably because nobody could hear him anyways.

"How are things going? Did I miss much?"

> Laura turned. Kana was standing beside her on the bleachers, two cups of steaming hot chocolate in her hands.<br> "Careful, they're hot!"

> Laura grabbed one quickly, glad for the warmth. She could only imagine how the players felt about now... Just looking at them made



her want to shiver. But she was doing that already. A whistle blew. The referees had stepped onto the field, and appeared to be having a hurried and somewhat loud conversation with the opposing team's coach, who was waving his arms around frantically as if trying to pull himself off the ground like a hummingbird. Laura settled onto the seat beside Kana. It didn't really matter that the rain had drenched it thoroughly; despite her umbrella, it had already done the same to her. She watched the teams gather on either side of the field. The opposition, the Wolverines (as they liked to call themselves), stood out fairly well in their bright orange-and-yellow jerseys, as they chatted amongst themselves. It made the home team's colors of white and deep blue appear rather depressing in comparison. She spotted a head or two from their own side who seemed to stand out rather well. Travis had been pulled near the center of the crowd, whereas another familiar face, Roberto, strayed near the edge as he made small talk with a few of his fellow teammates. Neither looked too pleased with the weather.<p>

Finally the small group in the center went their separate ways; the goalies to the sidelines and towards the crowds, and the coaches to their teams. The players soon after left the field, looks of resignation on each face as they passed by heading towards the school.

"What's going on?" Laura leaned out, watching the players pass.

"I don't know... Maybe they cancelled because of the weather?" Kana offered. She held up her hot chocolate and, blowing the steam off the top, took a small sip.

"But they were almost finished! Isn't that a bit unfair?"

"Well, it's not really our decision, is it? I mean, in weather like this people could get hurt, or even sick..."

Laura fell back onto the bench. Sadly, it was true. The game up until then was proof of that. What stung the most was the fact that their home team had looked close to winning the match. And now they would have to start over again. She couldn't help but feel as if they had been cheated out of their victory.

"We'd better call your parents... It's no good trying to walk home in this weather." Kana grabbed Laura's arm. "Remember... we have to call Kylie and June, and tell them how it went. They're going to flip!"

"Yeah...I almost forgot." Rising off the bench, the pair headed off in the direction of the school.

\* \* \*

>"Hey, Mom? The game went pretty good...But they had to cancel it because of the weather. Do you think you could come and pick us up when you get home? Thanks, I'll see you in a bit!"<p><p>

Laura dropped the receiver with a sigh. She had forgotten her mom had to do some shopping today. i She /i didn't know that the game would be ended early. Leaning against the wall beside the payphone, she crossed one arm tightly across her chest, the other automatically rising to fiddle with the small, seed-shaped lump that was buried



under the neckline of her shirt. She always did this when she was nervous. Her rain jacket lay on the floor beside her heaped in a pile with Kana's equally soaked one.

"Well... that was our last quarter. What now?" Laura voiced her thoughts.

"Hm...Well, there's not much we can do. We might as well just wait by the doors until your mother arrives." Kana had drained the last of her hot chocolate. Laura's half full cup had already gone luke warm. Shaking it, she tossed it into the garbage can. "I guess you're right... Maybe she'll turn up early." Overhead the lights flickered, and a deafening roll of thunder made them both jump. The storm was getting worse... Why, of all days, did this have to happen i today /i ? Laura picked up her jacket, and began down the empty hallway.

But... the hallway wasn't empty. There, standing in the middle of the corridor, was a small child. He had to be no older than six; his fiery red hair was soaking wet, and stuck out at odd angles as if it had just been struck by a particularly nasty bolt of lightning. He watched them with large almond-shaped eyes, the whole time sucking on a messy piece of chocolate.

"Who's that?" Kana whispered in a hushed voice. "I don't know... maybe it's someone's little brother" Laura looked equally confused at the moment; not so much confused about who this kid was, but why was he running around on his own? He looked a little young to be unsupervised. "Hello, are you lost?" She asked, attempting a friendly smile.

He didn't move. Barely even blinked. In fact, you would have never guessed that he had even heard her. He just stood there sucking noisily on that piece of chocolate. Then, as quickly as he had appeared he disappeared, running down the steps to the main corridor.

\* \* \*

>Laura got a phone call early next morning. Feeling slightly grumpy at being awoken so early on a Saturday, she climbed out of bed and shuffled down the stairs to where her mother was standing with the receiver in one hand.<p><p>

"It's Kana, Laura. Oh, and I need you to clean your room up before lunchtime."

Another disadvantage of being awoken so early. She held the phone to her ear, yawning. "Hey, Kana.. Why are you calling so early? It's barely nine!"

"Oh, you sleep in too late. Did you hear about what happened last night? Dad was talking about it on the phone with one of his friends... They work at the school. I overheard a bit of what he said."

The school? "No. Why, what happened?"

"Apparently someone came in after the teams left and trashed the boys' locker room... It's supposed to be a mess! They're trying to



find out who did it... But they don't have much for clues."

"Really?" Laura perked up somewhat. Who would wreck the boys' locker room? Even more important, why would they? "Someone must have snuck in after the team members yesterday... Otherwise, the school would have been locked up."

"That's not what the school thinks..." There was a pause on the other end of the line. "The team didn't all leave at once. Actually... Travis and Roberto volunteered to stay behind and clean up. Now, they're in hot water..."

"What?!"

"Laura, keep it down please.." Her mother chimed in, passing with an armful of laundry.

Laura sat down at the kitchen table, the phone cord stretching to near its whole length. "But, that's not fair! You said yourself they had no proof!"

"I know... But until they're finished with the investigation, the principal says he won't allow them to play on the team. "

"But... That's just not fair..." Laura slumped in her seat.

\* \* \*

>Laura stared down at her recess, only half-listening to the conversation going on around her. Kylie, June, Kana and her had chosen a shady spot of the school grounds, and just settled down to eat. She picked up a rice ball. Travis was sitting, for once by himself, on a bench across the field from them. Roberto was nowhere in sight. In fact, she wasn't even sure if he had come outside at all.<p><p>

"Laura, are you listening?"

"Huh?" Everybody was watching her, and she realized she was dangling her rice ball from only two fingers above the ground. Her other hand had gone up to her neckline again; she was fiddling with the lump under her shirt collar. Clutching it quickly, she glanced up with a small laugh.

"Sorry. I was just thinking."

"Looked like the complete opposite to me." Kylie commented, popping a grape in her mouth. "You okay?"

"Yeah, you haven't said anything since we came out here." June added.

"I think I'm just tired. Mr.Yoshi's been giving us too much homework lately." She faked a small yawn, though she knew already that they weren't buying it.

"Laura, Mr.Yoshi hasn't given us homework all week. He said it would spoil the field trip if we were too busy thinking about work. You aren't really that far behind, are you?" Kana sighed. "If you



needed any help, you could have just told me!"

"I'm not that far behind!" Yeesh. Of all people, Kana should know what's on her mind. She sighed, taking a bite of her recess.

"Oh! So what do you think of the field trip, then? I heard from some of the grade-sixes that it's supposed to be pretty boring. But there's lots of wildlife, and this year they're having a scavenger hunt!"

"Yeah! fun." Laura wrapped up the other two rice balls. She wasn't that hungry.

"What? I thought you loved scavenger hunts.." Kana trailed off. Laura was staring into space again. "Oh, for Pete's sake! Will you listen already?"

"Huh? Oh... well, don't you think that we're getting a bit old for things like that? I mean, they were fun when we were little kids. But we're in the 6th grade now. You'd think they could plan something a little more interesting."

"Oh!" Kana seemed to shrink on the spot, and Laura felt a twinge in the pit of her stomach. She didn't mean to embarrass her like that. But, it was the truth. A scavenger hunt didn't seem like much fun at the moment. Still! she hadn't meant to hurt Kana's feelings.

Kylie glanced between the two of them for a moment, and then piped up. "Well, I still think that scavenger hunts are fun. Right June?"

> June nodded. Laura could have sworn she saw a hard elbowing between the two of them, but decided not to say something. Because at that moment, Roberto came out of the schools front doors, crossing the field towards Travis.<p>

\* \* \*

>Recesses were too short. It was all too soon that she found herself back in the warm classroom, surrounded by the steady buzz of conversation. Mr.Yoshi was writing something on the board! but, at the moment, she didn't really care. Her head was too full of nagging thoughts. They prodded and pulled, leaving her feeling dazed and worn out inside. She tapped her pencil on the desk. She stared out the window. But nothing seemed of even the remotest interest to her. Slowly, her hand strayed to the notebook in front of her, and she began to write. Nothing to do with her work; but at least it looked as though it was. Then she began to doodle. A loop here, a spiral there! slowly, gradually her eyelids began to droop. Everything became a blur of colors. Even the clicking of chalk on the blackboard became a peaceful rhythm.<p><p>

That small child stood in front of her. The same child from the school the day of the game, with those blue eyes and bright, rust-colored hair. He was still holding the sticky bar of chocolate in one hand. What was he doing there? He definitely wasn't in her class! in fact, she wasn't even sure if he went to her school. Or if he was even old enough to go to school...

"Laura? Laura Haruno!"



"?" Laura jerked up, blinking owlshly and now aware of the chorus of laughter that was growing in her ears. A dreamâ€¦ so, she had just fallen asleep? Running her fingers through her squashed bangs â€" they had been caught between her forehead and the desktop - she found herself staring up at Mr.Yoshi. From the expression on his face she guessed he wasn't happy.

"Lauraâ€¦I'd like a word with you after class. Andâ€¦I think you should put more..." He gave a small cough, as if stalling to find a right word for what he wanted to say. "Moreâ€¦focus on your notes from now on. Do I make myself clear?"

Notesâ€¦? She glanced down at the notebook. And felt as if a particularly large rock had been dropped in the pit of her stomach. The entire two pages she had been 'taking notes' on were literally covered in scribbles. Stick figures, spirals, small squiggles... they filled up to the very edges of the paper. But they were nothing. Scrawled across the middle of the pageâ€¦

ROBERTO

It spread out across both of the pages, surrounded by a flock of tiny hearts. Covering it quickly with one arm, she glanced up with a sheepish smile while attempting to erase what she could of the mess. Laura x Travisâ€¦ where did that come from? Tearing out the pages and crumpling them, she hastily salvaged whatever notes she could from the blackboard. The heat was really getting to herâ€¦

"Travis?" She heard a sigh from across the class, and glanced up. Travis, looking equally as dazed as she imagined she had, was staring down at the desk. He didn't even seem to care that Mr.Yoshi was standing over him. In fact he didn't even seem to notice for a few seconds. When he finally did, she noticed that there was no laughter from the class as there had been for her.

"Oh. Uhmâ€¦ Sorry." Grabbing for his pencil, he began to write.

Mr.Yoshi rubbed his forehead. "Perhapsâ€¦you should stay after school with Laura today. If you're both feeling so tired-" At this Laura glanced back down at her paper. Was he just doing this because of what she'd written on the paper? If he wasâ€¦it certainly wasn't funny.

"After school? But we have the semi-finals today, Mr.Yoshi!"

"You can keep track from the window, Travis.."

"But I'm playing!"

This seemed to get some attention. Laura glanced back up, her hand having again inadvertently risen to her neckline. Travis's expression had changed from dazed to alarmed. The rest of the class had, too. Coughing, Mr.Yoshi tried not to look rattled by this â€" even though she'd noticed that he'd dropped his pen on Travis's desk by accident.

"Wellâ€¦ that's very nice to hear, Travis. I hope you do well then." Still looking rather dazed, he returned to his desk.



Travis continued to write. Though, Laura's hand had once again drifted from the paper. He was playing? Then that meant they had caught the real culprit! Thoughâ€¦ She glanced over to Travis. From her angle, she could barely see the side of his face. But he didn't look happy. And what about Roberto? If Travis was playing again, then that had to mean that Roberto was too, right?

The day dragged by slower than ever. When the bell finally did ring there was a mad dash as everyone fairly fought to escape the stifling room. The team members took a separate path from everyone else, heading down the main corridor and towards the boys' locker room. Laura watched them as she waited for Kana to join her. They had both decided to sit on the side of the field today. It was nice out, unlike the last game, and they could get a better view of the field. Travis had been pulled towards the middle of the crowd. Despite the overall upbeat attitude of the team, he looked more miserable than ever.

She felt her shoulder jerk backwards as somebody bumped past her. It was Roberto. He was heading for the stairs, leading to the downstairs corridor. Something in his posture made her feel uneasy. Why wasn't he going with the team? She followed him, careful to keep her distance. "Hey, Roberto!" She called out, leaning over the stairwell.

He didn't hear her. He disappeared from sight, footsteps echoing as he walked down the lower hallway.

She hurried downstairs. The bottom corridor wasn't somewhere she usually went. It was all of the older classes, grade sixes and extra rooms. The last time she had come down was for paper towel, after Kana got sick in class and Mr. Yoshi asked her to go get some. Now, following him along the long hall, it felt almost like a different school. Most of the students had left. The few still hanging around were either behind closed doors or just leaving now.

He turned, stopping at one of the plain gray entrances, and knocked. She slowed. What was he doing down here?

"Laura?"

He had spotted her. She jogged over, feeling slightly awkward. It must have looked odd for her to be following him all of this way. \_Him\_, of all peopleâ€¦ their recent past together had been what could only be described as bizarre and even a little awkward. As the thought of it bubbled up in the back of her mind, even, she began to feel a light glow rise in her cheeks. Her hand was again tugging nervously at the lump that was concealed beneath the fold of her shirt; she quickly brought it down to her side. Why had she even been air-headed enough to track him down like this? Who knew what dumb ideas he'd get in his head, especially after her having quite pointedly avoiding him for the last few weeks. In factâ€¦ if she wasn't careful, she was going to be late for the game. Maybe she should just leave now? Yet she felt oddly cemented to the spot as he turned, his green eyes falling upon her. Quickly she fumbled for something to say.

> "Uh - Roberto, what are you doing down here? I thought you were playing."<p>

"What? Oh... yeah. " He trailed off into a mutter, opening the door



in front of him and ducking hastily inside, being sure to shut it behind him. Only some muffled voices were now audible. Quietly, she crept over to the doorway, reading the words scrawled across the front in large, bold black letters:

"Detention".

\* \* \*

>They lost.<p><p>

It was easily the worst game of the year " considering it was their only loss. Not only a defeat, but a slaughter. The final score was 28 to 3. It seemed that the team had lost heart along with Travis - even though they had put in the effort, it was as if something had been bogging down on each team member. As the final whistle blew and the players cleared off the field, there was none of the usual cheering. None of the usual celebration. Just a deathly silence.

Laura took a sip from her water bottle. Inwardly, she felt numb. Outside she probably looked fine. How could they lose so badly? She had missed the beginning of the game. After remembering her detention with Mr. Yoshi she had run back upstairs, only to find the class empty. Apparently he too had forgotten and left early to watch the match. They had gone without Roberto before, and done fine. But today they almost seemed as if they were cursed. Picking up her jacket and book bag, she waited for Kana to do the same. She looked no healthier.

"I can't believe it we were slaughtered!" She exclaimed, slinging her sweater over her shoulder and dusting the grass blades off her bare knees. "We were a shoe-in for this game! How did this happen?"

"If I knew, I'd tell you!" Laura stuffed the water bottle into her book bag. She was tempted to confront Travis about how he'd managed to get back onto the team and Roberto didn't. Though with one glance, she figured it wasn't the best time. The Wolverines were causing enough racket bouncing about in their ridiculously colored outfits, slapping high fives and generally having a good time.

The field cleared off quickly. As Laura and Kana walked home, they discussed and re-discussed the whole game. It didn't make sense.

"Maybe it was such a letdown from the last game! It was pretty unfair what they did.." Kana shrugged her shoulders. "I mean, hey, odder things have happened."

"I know." Laura sighed. "I just can't believe it! Roberto was the only one missing."

"He was?"

"Yeah. Didn't you notice?"

" " "

Laura glanced over at her. "He's one of their best players! How couldn't you notice?"



Kana paused, and Laura couldn't help but notice the funny look she was giving her. For the second time that day she felt the boiling in her cheeks. "Well, he isn't exactly in the limelight, is he? That's Travisâ€¦ I mean, not that he doesn't deserve it or anything! I thought you would have noticed that of all people, really..." She raised her hands defensively. "I meanâ€¦ it's just Roberto, right?" She forced a small, tuneless giggle, which fell dead on the air. "Anyways, even if he wasn't on the fieldâ€¦ it shouldn't have made that much of a difference really."

Laura was about to respond to this, when she noticed someone cross the street up ahead. It was Travis. Still in soccer jersey and shorts, he turned and moved briskly around the corner, head bowed slightly against the setting sun. She was surprised he had nobody with himâ€¦ then again, why would he? He usually wasn't one to travel with the flocksâ€¦ wait, whom was she kidding? Of course he was! Especially after a gameâ€¦ then again, it had been so long since they'd lost so badlyâ€¦ maybe he'd snuck off to be on his own for a while.

"Uhâ€¦ Kana? Is it okay if I-"

"Go ahead." She cut her off. Her expression looked something between mild disappointment and curiosity. Either way she understood. Giving her a quick wave goodbye, she ran off around the corner.

It turned out that one person was harder to keep track of than she thought. By the time she rounded the corner, he was already out of sight. She just barely caught a glimpse of him as he rounded yet another corner, and tried to catch up. But he kept disappearing no matter how fast she ran. Either he was a very fast walker â€"which would make sense, what with all the soccer he played-, or she was just a very slow runner.

When she finally caught up to him some ten minutes later, leaning out over a bridge that straddled one of the town's rivers as the sun began to fall in the sky, her feet were sore from pounding against the hard sidewalk and she was desperately combating the cramping of a stitch in her side.. Great. Now she had to look like a complete red-faced idiot in front of him. She wasn't quite sure how he managed to always look so calm and clean after every game; she had only run a short distance and came out looking like some sort of cheap horror movie monster.

At last Travis seemed notice her. Squaring his shoulders slightly, he leaned against the edge of the bridge. She couldn't deny that there was a distinct slump in his usually quite handsomely proper posture; whether it was from the game, or some other thing weighing on her mind, she wasn't sure. "Heyâ€¦. what do you want?"

"Oh, hey Travis!" She said, voice faltering a bit and sounding as if it were a surprise to see him there. Of course, she \_always \_spent her time jogging all around the city after games. "Nice afternoon, huh?"

His expression suggested he had swallowed something particularly nasty, and his gaze fell back into the stream. "Hehâ€¦ sure. Let me guessâ€¦ you're here to say to my face what everyone else has been thinking."



"N-no! Waitâ€¦| what are you talking about?"

Travis sighed and rubbed his forehead. The sunlight reflected up off the river and onto his face as he glanced back over to her; it decorated his skin with patches of golden light, giving it a hauntingly eerie look.

> "â€¦|I'm sorry. I just can't believe we lost. No â€¦" I can believe it. Butâ€¦| we <em>shouldn't <em>have lost. We... should have had Roberto out there."

"!?" This came as a shock to her, especially coming from Travis. Had he come to the same conclusion as she had? Had he noticed, too? She took another cautious step forwards.

"Wellâ€¦| it's not the team's fault, right? Roberto got himself kicked off the team. You shouldn't be blaming yourself â€¦" if anything, you should be blaming him! Anyways, you don't know that things would have gone any better with him on the field-

"It's not that." Travis leaned further out over the railing, now putting most of his weight on it. Laura couldn't help but get the uneasy feeling that he was prepared to teeter over the edge and plunge into the river below, or vomit, or something. He was taking care now not to look her in the eyes, nowâ€¦| and it made her uneasy. "We \_should \_have had Roberto out there because he \_should have been allowed to play \_. It was because he was penned up inside like that the team's morale was ruined. We just needed him there so that everyone wouldn't be playing with him on their minds."

"Well.. it couldn't have been avoided."

"It could have."

"What?" Laura paused. What was he getting atâ€¦|? "Look, Travis. \_He \_trashed the boys' locker room, not you. I mean, it wasn't as if you could have \_taken \_the blame for himâ€¦| right..?"

"â€¦|" Travis paused, and she had the feeling she had said something wrong. He sighed, pushing off the bridge railing, smiling bitterly as his eyes finally rose to meet hers.

> "Lauraâ€¦| don't you get it? Roberto didn't ruin the boys' locker room. I was with him the whole night."<p>

Laura started. "He was? But then..."

Travis grimaced. She didn't want to hear the words come out of his mouth; she knew they would, but she still didn't. It just made things so much easier that way.

"Roberto is innocent."

\* \* \*

>Uh... okay. Honestly I'm not sure how long it's been for me to update this. Two... three years maybe? I left the next chapter rotting on my computer, partially finished, and just picked it up recently and decided to work on it. and the best news - the next chapter is already almost finished, so I should have that up relatively soon C:. Sorry to anyone who might, by some phenomenal



chance, have started reading the first chapter of this waaaaay back and is only going to read this continuation now. Also forgive me if my style's really changed... I haven't watched Hamtaro in 2-3 years, so it's probably a bit off from what the characters are usually like.<p><p>

### 3. Lost!

Okay...this chapter turned out a little dry. I'll be going back later to retouch it, most likely, and spice it up a little. Bear with me please.

But yeah. It's jumped forewards a few days from where the last chapter left off, to the day of the scavenger hunt. What's gonig to happen now? Read, and find out.

\* \* \*

>It was the day of the field trip. Laura had decided to have fun with her outfit for today; she wore a sky blue t-shirt, with a pink skirt she had only gotten a few days before " specifically for the trip. After moaning painfully to her mother all weekend about how odd she was going to look, roaming around the woods in a pair of red shorts (Heaven forbid!) she had finally gotten it. It looked perfect; twirling, she admired its soft color.<p><p>

"Earth to Laura.." Kana giggled, grabbing her friend's arm. "You still alive in there?"

"I don't know." Laura giggled as well, holding out her skirt and showing it off. What do you think? Doesn't it look nice?"

"Well, sure" If you want to risk it getting dirty."

"Huh? Hey, that's not funny!"

Kana shrugged. "Well, you'll have to be careful. You don't want it ruined, especially since it's new" isn't it going to be a bit hard to search in?"

"Search?"

Kana sighed. "The scavenger hunt!"

"Oh" Laura had almost forgotten about that. Which made her wonder; who would her partner be for the scavenger hunt? At least Roberto wasn't around" since he had taken the blame for the damage done to the locker room, he wasn't allowed on the trip. A painful grumble rose in her stomach as her fateful conversation from the other night rose into her mind; in the evening, when she had been conversing on the bridge with Travis. He hadn't said much after admitting Roberto's innocence; other than asking her not to tell anyone else, and uttering a few words of self-pity.

> "He took the fall for the team " I <em>could<em> have taken the blame for him." He'd sighed, again pressing all of his weight against the railing and causing it to utter a slight groan. Then, rising to his feet, he'd bid her goodnight and headed off in the other direction. She'd been tempted to walk with him, even if it was in the opposite direction of her place - just to comfort him a little. But



her own mind was bubbling over with new thoughts and troubles. She'd hardly slept at all that night, and when she had she'd been haunted by dreams of giant basketballs and chocolate rain. Why? Roberto was, though improving gradually, a jerk. Yet she couldn't help but feel sorry for himâ€| after all he really loved animals. Especially dogs â€" not that they'd be seeing any on this trip. Above all, it didn't seem like something he'd do - taking the fall, that is. Was this the snide, showy person she knew? Though he hadn't always been snide... he'd proven that to her before, she remembered, feeling an even deeper shade of red rise in her face. She clutched the lump under her neckline tightly, staring at the dewy grass at her feet and trying to shake the words out of her mind that he'd said back on that stupid Saturday morning.

"Okay, everyone gather around!" Mr. Yoshi had crawled on top of a nearby tree stump, and was talking through a 'megaphone' â€" a rolled up piece of paper, shaped like an ice cream cone. In his free hand he was holding up a black baseball cap. "In this hat I have the names of everybody on this trip! Names will be drawn randomly, in pairs of two. When I call out your name, you must find your partner. Please remember not to get separated from your partner!"

"Cross your fingers..." Kana breathed, winking at Laura out of the corner of her eye and grinning. Laura returned the smile, feeling a slight sinking in the pit of her stomach. Kana really was into these sorts of thingsâ€| why couldn't she be? To be honest, it wasn't that she had outgrown themâ€| group activities had never really been her thing. Probably why she had gotten Hamtaro â€" a small, fuzzy friend who she could confide in, one-on-one without worrying about what he would think. If he even did think much about what she said.

"..Kana and T.J! Laura and Roberto!"

Roberto!? Wait, no, she had to have heard wrong. Earlier that day Laura had overheard Mr. Yoshi telling some of the students that because of his recent behavior, he was banned from this trip. But even as she stood and tried to pick her jaw up off the dewy morning grass, she spotted the familiar figure weaving through the crowd. His shoulders were hunched, and his face an unusual shade of pink â€" probably because of all the stares he was receiving from his classmates. At least she wasn't the only one in shock to see him there. Fighting the urge to bolt, she rambled out the first words that came to mind as he came within hearing range, her previous feelings towards him rapidly eroding away.

"You! What â€" why - what are you doing here??? I thought you had to stay home today!"

"Well gee, thanks. It's nice to see you too." Roberto sniffed, turning his head moodily to one side and frowning. "My dad managed to convince the principal to let me come along at the last minute. Since it has nothing to do with the soccer team, he OK'd it. So we're stuck with each other for the day..."

Stomp.

> "Ow â€"hey, watch it! Geezâ€|"<p>

Had she been a slightly more aggressive person, Laura would have sent Roberto running. What was with him anyways? If anything, he seemed



even grumpier than usual. And being his usual grumpy self had to be a challenge enough. Quickly she grabbed Kana and dragged her off to the sidelines. As the excited chatter of the student body dimmed, she wheeled on her friend, pulling in frustration at her hair and making a noise that sounded somewhat like a cat that had just had its tail stepped on.

"Auuugh!!! Can you\*\* believe \*\*him? The nerve of that stupid jerk, he always has to be around ruining things for me! Whyâ€¦ of all peopleâ€¦ it's just soâ€¦ Auuugh!!!"

"Shh Laura, keep it downâ€¦" Kana put a comforting hand on her shoulder as a few curious students paused to stare at them. "Look. He's probably just a little stressed about being kicked off the teamâ€¦ try to deal with it for now, okay? Maybe the scavenger can take his mind off of it for a while. Just try to be nice about it... okay?"

"Be nice? I'll be-"

"LAURA."

Grr. "Argh... fine. FINE. I can't believe this..."

She stomped back to the field, searching for the red-head. This was \_unbelievable... \_of all the rotten luck! Grumbling inwardly, she caught a glance of the red hair and reached out for the figure.

> "Hey, Laura! There you are..."<br> "?" This voice - Travis? The flash of red hair dissapeared into the crowd; she couldn't help but notice that it was a lot shorter than Roberto. Spinning on her heel, she faced her crush. "Travis! Oh... hey. Are you ready for the scavenger hunt?"

> "Haha, yeah... it should be fun." He grinned. He certainly looked a lot happier than he had the other day, though not necessairily as much as his usual self. He put a hand on her shoulder; it was soft, light, but warm. "Listen, I... just wanted to thank you. for listening to me the other night... it... really meant a lot."<br> "Oh..." She paused a moment, fumbling for words. "It was nothing Travis. Really, anytime."

> "Well, anyways... I just wanted to tell you-"<br> The sound of Mr. Yoshi's foghorn sounded, and they were soon caught up in a mass of people moving in all directions. Laura only caught a quick last glimpse of Travis's face, a two-fingered wave of a hand, and a smile - his smile, directed at her - before his hand was pulled from her shoulder and they were parted. Laura felt herself being bumped back almost violently by the wave of people. She offbalanced.

> "Hey - Laura, there you are! Don't run off like that.." A new hand grabbed her shoulder; this one was strong and firm, sudden almost to the point that it was painful. Roberto steadied her. "You gonna be okay?"<br> "? Oh, yeah... I guess." Laura replied somewhat distantly. Her temper for Roberto's sudden and unanticipated arrival was subdued. Her eyes were still searching the crowd where only moments ago, Travis had been.

\* \* \*

>After the quick scene in the crowd, the first half hour of Roberto and Laura's time together was spent in almost complete silence, other than naming the items they had to find. Some things were fairly easy - a pine cone, some moss, a certain sort of leaf - while others



proved to be a little more challenging. The forest around them was alive with the noise of enthusiastic contenders. People wove in front of and around them, grabbing whatever they could find and calling out to their partners; it was really a bit of a headache, one which Laura felt wouldn't be helped with all of this nonsense. And on top of it all, there was Roberto - running, yelling, upbeat and surprisingly subdued Roberto. A little storm cloud practically followed her along as they tramped through the forest.<p><p>

Roberto on the other hand didn't seem to mind as much - if anything he was enjoying himself. He didn't say much to Laura; however he had already managed to find half a dozen of the items on their list and had pointed a few people in the right direction for items on their lists. She watched him running back and forth; stooping here, calling someone over there... he truly seemed to be enjoying himself. Why had he risked missing this, then? It didn't sound like him at all. "Roberto is innocent", Travis had said - so why did he put himself in the line of fire? For the 'good of the team'? For Travis?

It was a moment before she found herself studying him. When he wasn't face to face with her, he was so much more... pleasant. He was smiling a lot more than usual as he chatted with everyone else - at least, smiling more than he did when he spoke with \_her\_. \_What was that about, anyways? Was it that he chose to treat her that way, or... perhaps... was it her own fault? She noticed him casting a glance at her from the corner of his eye; quickly she looked away. Now, instead of him she found herself casting jealous glances at any classmate that spoke with him. Something about their chemistry, she suddenly envied. Why couldn't they be that way together... why couldn't things between them be more \_normal\_?

Wait - what was she THINKING!? This was Roberto - the kid who had almost brained her with a soccerball, been pig-headed day in and day out, and been as bossy and rude as manners could allow. Why would she want to be on better terms with \_him\_?

Some more time passed, and the numbers began to thin out. The forest was fairly large... once they had gotten far enough away from the clearing there was plenty of room for people to be dispersed in. Soon Roberto came jogging up to her. His face was flushed, and he had another handful of items which were dropped into their sack. She noticed that since the ranks had thinned out so much, he hadn't spoken with anyone in a while.

"I think that's almost it..." He muttered, brushing his hands off on his pants. "You know, it might help if \_you did \_some of the searching..."

"I did! I found the pine cone, and some of the leaves we needed..." Laura frowned, clenching her jaw. "Besides, you didn't exactly \_invite \_me to beforehand..."

"Ooooh, I'm so sorry... I didn't know her \_majesty\_ needed an \_invitation..."

"Roberto, just-" But she stopped herself. She'd told Kana that she'd try to be nice to him, and despite every bone in her body that was urging her to lash out, she bit her tongue.

"Just what?"



"Just... let's just go." Her jaw clenched. "What's the last item?"

He paused, and she noticed his eyebrows raise right into his bangs. She stared at him, and avoiding her gaze he uncrinkled the paper. "Um... it's... I don't know! You smudged the writing or something.."

"What?"

Roberto frowned, showing her the smear on the corner of the page. "It looks kind of like... 'sap'."

"I don't think so? See? That's a 'g' - "

"You're kidding me."

"No, I'm serious!" Laura snatched the paper from his fingers, trying to read through the mess. "It looks like... 'egg' if you ask me."

"WHAT? How do you get 'egg' out of \_that\_?"

Laura sighed. "Fine... you look for sap, I'll look for an egg. Seriously, if you're going to be so \_stubborn\_ about it..."

"Watch who you call stubborn, egg-head!"

"GRR!!!" Laura tossed the paper at him, stomping off into the woods. Well at least she'd tried... but it was no use. She just couldn't keep her temper around HIM. Something about him just made her so... angry. It wasn't fair!

She was aware that the shadows around her were being cast longer, and that it was getting late. The woods were mute now; save for the sound of her own footsteps, which seemed lonely and out of place. She grumbled to herself. Why... why did Roberto have to be so pig-headed? And illiterate? And... and... just ARGH!!! She kicked a stone in her mood, starting as it bounded off a nearby tree trunk with a resounding crack. She glanced up; there was a nest.

Now, Laura wasn't a particularly good climber... but she was stubborn. It was about twenty minutes later that she had neared the mid-way mark of the tree, just below her goalpoint. The nest was just beyond her grasp.

"Laura?"

"Roberto?" In her struggle she'd forgotten that she wasn't alone. Roberto had apparently traced her steps and decided to follow her, instead of taking his own separate path as she decided to. He was standing a few metres off, hands raised, staring up into the tree with an expression that was hard to describe; though, it looked like he was worried.

"Laura, be careful! Geez..."

"I'm fine, Roberto. And look!" Freeing a hand, she pointed to the eggs. But it caused her to overbalance; and as she wobbled



dangerously, she became quite suddenly aware of something. She was high up, about twenty feet or so. But not only was there that... she was high up - in a \_skirt.\_ And Roberto was \_below \_her. With a sudden yelp, she went to cover herself - and felt as the branch she was supported on splinter and snap, failing to hold her any longer. She fell.

"LAURA!"

Everything after that was a blur. A horrible, rushing sensation, wind roaring past her ears and hair slapping against her face, arms flailing to grab at anything as she plummeted downward. Terror grasped her in a way she had never felt before. It was blind terror, shocking to the system so badly that it makes it difficult to think or do anything but lash out. She couldn't do anything. ANYTHING. Everything went dark for but a moment; it was almost peaceful... and then WHUMP - she had landed with a bone-jarring thud.

All of this happened in a matter of seconds. When she opened her eyes, at last, she was facing upwards towards a sky that was fast turning from a light to darker, fushcia-tinted shade of blue, and spinning slowly in a clockwise motion through her marred vision. Her ears were buzzing; her head was throbbing. But she was alive. And, surprisingly... not on hard ground, but something much more yielding.

"Unngh..."

"Roberto?"

She scrambled into a sitting position as Roberto groaned again. He lay on his back, his knees propped up on either side of her awkwardly, one arm beneath him to cushion himself. He had broken her fall! Laura felt another bout of dizziness take her, as she watched him rise slowly and painfully to his feet. He had saved her... not looking particularly heroic at the moment, as he tried vainly to keep from collapsing, but she couldn't help but be grateful, and a light flush rose into her cheeks.

"..Hey, you hear me?"

"Oh - what?" Laura shook her head; immediately regretting it as more dizziness overcame her.

"I asked if you were okay." Roberto repeated gruffly. He offered a hand, and from his expression she could tell that he was trying his best to play the part of the modest saviour. She ignored his hand, rising onto one foot. "Yeah, I feel alright... thanks for-AAGH!" A burning sensation caused her to collapse back onto the forest floor, and she felt herself unconsciously cradling her ankle, leaning forward and trying to keep the tears from springing into her eyes. It was a difficult thing to do.

"Laura? Are you okay?" She felt a shadow pass over her; Roberto had come to her side, kneeling once again. She turned her face away and bit her lip to keep from any sort of exclamation as her ankle gave another violent jolt. The pain was unbearable; it shot out to every part of her leg, causing it to seize up and her breath to stop short. She waited until the burning abated, then spoke in a quiet, controlled tone. "I'm... fine."



"You're...fine."

"Yeah. I... think I just... bent my ankle a little." \_Yeah, just a little. Really.\_

"A \_little?"\_

"Mhmm." She tenderly put her weight on it. The pain doubled and she fell back with a yelp - this time, she couldn't contain it. Oh no, oh no oh no... why now? Please, please... this was the last thing she needed, stuck in the middle of the forest with (of all people) Roberto who, as it so happened, was looking about as ill as she felt - though for different reasons. His jaw tightened. "Laura, you can't walk on that. You'll just hurt yourself and slow us down."

"Slow us down? No, look, seriously I'm fine!" She leaned forward, but somehow just couldn't bring herself to endure that wrenching pain again, and instead fell back with a sigh of defeat. Hot tears welled up in her eyes, no longer under her control. This... this just wasn't fair... \_what\_ had she done to deserve this?

"We need to get you out of here, Laura..." Roberto paused, hesitant. Then, biting his lip, he turned and crouched with his back to her. "Get on."

"Whaaat?"

"Laura, we need to get out of here. It's going to be dark soon. Now get on."

\* \* \*

><em>Crunch. Crunch.<em>

Laura's head lolled back and forth lightly. The pain in her ankle had subsided somewhat; however it had left her feeling beaten, and she was in no mood to do anything but go along with Roberto as they trudged through the woods. She hadn't put up much of an argument when he offered to carry her, obviously, as she couldn't even limp let alone walk in her current condition. It was surprising to find out how easily he was able to lift her off the cold earth and onto his back; how carefully he carried her across the uneven ground despite having taken a beating himself. She now lay sedate, both arms wound lightly around his neck to keep from falling, one leg doing the same while her injured one dangled limp; it gave a painful throb every now and then. The sky was a deep shade of rosy violet now and she was sure they had been out hours later than they were supposed to be. Had they really been travelling around the forest that long? Had she passed out, and not noticed the time?

Soon, whether because of the darkening sky, fatigue, or the steady rhythm of their movement, Laura found her mind beginning to drift. Thoughts lingered to the forest before them, where she imagined figments of the night, then to Roberto... the continual steady twichting of his muscles as he worked to balance her, the perpetual - and increasingly heavy - breaths he took with each step, the lingering scent she caught from the nape of his neck... most of all the beating of his heart, which she could feel faintly from where she rested. Then her thoughts began to drift to other things... and



before she knew it she said it -

"You didn't have to do it, you know."

"...What?"

Was she out of her mind??? It had been the one subject she had been avoiding all afternoon. Still, words continued to spill out of her mouth, half-muttered in her fatigued state.

"It wasn't your fault... you shouldn't have taken the blame, Roberto. But you did." She frowned into his shoulder. "Why did you, Roberto? Was it just your ego acting up, or..."

"If I hadn't, Travis would have. And he definitely didn't deserve it. He wasn't involved at all."

"And you were?"

"..." Roberto's silence soaked into the evening, and left them in silence for the next few minutes. When she finally did speak, he said:

"Look, the better man got to play. We still lost."

"Travis isn't betterâ€|you just getâ€| overlooked." She muttered lamely. This conversation was going nowhere...

"Overlooked?" He laughed. "You say it like it would make no difference. Think about it." He paused, leaning against a nearby tree. He was panting, now, and flushedâ€| then again he had just carried her half a mile through a hot, sticky forest. "Okay, say it had been me. What would everyone do if Travis had been stuck in detention?"

"..."

"It would have been worse. At least with him on the field... we had a chance. If you want to blame anyone..." It was his turn to finish off lamely.

"Ugh.." Laura frowned, still muttering into his shoulder. Had she been talking to anyone else, her voice would have been too muffled to hear. "Blame who? If you know anything about what happened..." She paused, trying to adjust her skirt while not slipping off Roberto's back. Bad move.

"Augh!"

"Hey!"

Well that woke her up... at least the ground was soft. Spitting out a mouthful of dirt she did her best to scramble off Roberto, who had already been trying to rise. He glared at her accusingly. "Nice moveâ€| so what, are you trying to give us both sprained ankles now!?"

"Geez, I'm sorry alright? It's not my fault you can't keep your balance. You would think all of that soccer would do something for youâ€| " Dusting her skirt off â€" which was now dirty, thanks to



Roberto " she used a tree stump to try and stand, biting her lip and trying not to let dizziness overcome her.

"Be careful. What do you think you're doing? Come here, I-"

"I'm fine." She gasped. She had almost forgotten how badly her ankle hurt " wobbling, she grabbed the collar of Roberto's shirt, balancing dangerously. "Yagh!" Okay, so this was a little harder than she thought it would be. She glanced up at Roberto to comment on this " not that he'd really care or anything " and found that he had a rather unusual expression on his face, staring just below her face - at her neckline.

> "Uh... oh - here." He grabbed her wrist, helping steady her while pulling himself up. Apparently he'd noticed her staring at him, for he'd quickly glanced off in the opposite direction, drawing his lips tightly together and looking intently off into the forest, his ears turning a shade brighter than his hair color. What - wait. The locket he'd given her - it flashed momentarily into her mind, as she realized she'd tied it around her neck that morning. Embarrassing as it was to admit... she'd worn it almost every day over the last few weeks, keeping it hidden beneath her shirt collar. It hadn't meant much to her really... well okay, maybe a little at the beginning... but now she just wore it out of habit, and comfort. Quickly she grasped at her neck, and found to her mortification that it had slipped out during the fall.<p>

"Ah! Oh..." She slipped it back under her shirt. Had he seen it? Probably... Oh lord! Could this day get any worse? Dipping her head, she pushed Roberto away and grabbed the tree stump, easing herself onto the forest floor. That was it. She was done, she wasn't going anywheres else. She was tired, hungry, lost... it was getting cold and dark out, and above all - her ankle was killing her! She touched it lightly with her fingertips and gave an involuntary sob.

The sky had darkened to a deep blue overhead, accented with violet; the first few stars of the night began to appear. It was beautiful... but at the same time, it showed the pressing danger of their situation. Laura shivered. They needed to get back soon.

Roberto slumped a few feet in front of her, knees drawn up to his chest. He seemed to have no protest to her sudden change of heart and, in mortifying silence, they sat still for at least ten or fifteen minutes. Oh lord... now what was he thinking about? He'd seen it - she knew - and with her luck, thoughts of marriage or something absolutely ridiculous like that were running through his head. And of course, he'd have to ask her why she was wearing it... and she'd have no choice but to answer-

"I had to take the blame."

"?" Laura started. She'd almost forgotten about their conversation before the fall... now, glancing up, she could see that his gaze was averted to the ground; he was talking into his feet. Surprised - and somewhat relieved that this was what he was thinking about - she kept her silence.

After a few minutes he continued. "I... the whole situation... I know who did it. I couldn't let him take the blame... he's just a kid..."



"Who?"

He hesitated for a few moments. She could tell he didn't want to have to keep going. But she'd push him, and eventually... "My cousin Rhodry. He's staying with us while my aunt and uncle are away. They're... getting divorced."

"Divorced..." Laura bit her lip. Divorce? What did that have to do with him going kiddy-arson on the locker room? Se leaned foreward, frowning.

Roberto gave a small nod, and in the dim light she could barely catch his thin smile. "It's been hard on him... he's been doing a lot of stupid things lately. So when we had to stay at school after the game, my parents were out and I had to watch over him."

"But he got away..." Laura pressed on.

"?" Roberto glanced up, and for the first time since he began talking she saw a glimmer of interest in his face. "Yeah... how did you know?"

Images of the young, flame-headed kid ran through her head, the one whom she'd noticed had a peculiar resemblance to Roberto. "We saw him in one of the upstairs corridors. He was running around on his own - we tried to catch him, but he got away." Laura hesitated; things were finally beginning to sink in. "But, Roberto - it's not your fault! You can go back, tell the coach, and-"

"I'm not going to\_, Laura. Don't you get it?" Roberto's voice rose. "If they find out, he'll get in trouble. I can't do that to him..."

"Roberto... he needs someone to talk to... it sounds like things might be better if he got caught. I know it sounds bad, but - well - try to think about it from his point of view. I'm sure he'll thank you later." She hesitated. The sky was finally dark. Stars hovered overhead fully illuminated; yet they did nothing to help her see how Roberto was reacting to all of this. He was deathly silent... was he listening, or just resting? Ooh, and it was really beginning to get late! Laura shivered and, reaching out, quietly searched for Roberto. But his hand found hers first; grabbing it tightly, she felt him move, wobbling slightly as he rose; she didn't like this feeling at all.

"Come on... let's get going."

"Roberto..."

\* \* \*

>Were they ever going to get home? It didn't seem so... they had been walking another forty minutes and still no sign of people. Laura shivered; she was cold, and her head was beginning to swim with fatigue. Beneath her, Roberto seemed to be taking the worst of the situation; each breath now came out sharply, heavily, and he was stumbling rather than pacing himself. Her arm that was wrapped around his neck was moist with perspiration. Eew.<p><p>

Fortunately the chill of the nighttime didn't have much of a chance



to sink in. Soon, they heard a faint call; it was followed by the firefly-like glimmer of flashlights; as Roberto stumbled out of the thinning woodline, the forest exploded with a chorus of loud yells. They had been spotted by Mr Yoshi and a band of policeman; they later learned that the other students had been taken home hours before, when they first realized that Laura and Roberto had gone missing together. None of them had any idea where they were.

"Laura! Roberto! Thank goodness-" A shadow blotted out the beams of light; Laura could see the dim silhouettes of Charlotte, Mr. Yoshi's fiancée, as she sprinted across the cold ground towards them. "Are you alright? You must be cold - Laura, WHAT happened to your leg!?"

Laura allowed herself to slide from Roberto's shoulders and into Mrs. Yoshi's arms, where she was quickly bundled in a blanket. "My ankle... I fell... I think it..." Her throat felt oddly raw and tight. However, an immense feeling of relief had washed over her; she was safe at last... And warm... And Roberto was-

"Laura... Laura? Are you feeling any better?"

Laura blinked. She was sitting inside one of the squad cars, now, with her feet dangling out the door. A cup of steaming hot chocolate had been forced into her hands; even as she sat in the chill air, the steam was warming her face. How long had she been dozing? Numbly she looked up... and found herself almost nose-to-nose with Travis.

"Laura... are you feeling any better?" He repeated.

"Travis... what are you doing here..?" She murmured. She thought all of her classmates had gone home... Travis shouldn't be here... that wasn't right... was she dreaming?

Travis sighed, and knelt in front of her. "Laura... everyone was so worried about you. When we all returned from the scavenger hunt, you and Roberto were the only two missing. Some teachers were sent out to search, but... they couldn't find anything... then it started to get dark, and we had to head home (my uncle is with the police so I persuaded him to let me stay)." He took a breath. "It's... good to see that you're alright."

Laura took a small sip of the chocolate. The liquid felt warm as it trickled down her throat. Everything seemed to be moving so quickly... it was difficult to take it all in. "Travis... is..?"

Laura paused, startled. Her hands were wrapped around the styrofoam cup; his hands were now wrapped around hers, cupping them tightly. "You're still freezing... you should get some sleep." He forced a small smile. Funny, though. Even in her state... she could see that he still wanted to talk. She wanted to keep him there, just for a few more moments... even as her head was swimming heavier than ever... say something...

> "Is Roberto okay..?" She muttered. Travis paused. "Well?"<p>

It looked like she'd said the wrong thing. Travis hesitated a moment; he hadn't expected her to say this. "Um... Roberto's fine... for now." It was his turn to lower his voice. He glanced down at her



hands. "He's just tired."

"Oh..."

"Alright! Travis, Laura? It looks like we can go now... we need to take you to the hospital Laura... Roberto's car just left a few minutes ago. The hot chocolate help any?" Mr Yoshi knelt beside her and a rather dissapointed Travis.

"Um.. yeah... I think so. Thank you."

The elementary teacher took another glance at her, lips pursed. Then, rising, he carefully hoisted her leg into her car - she only noticed now the makeshift splint that had been put onto it - and closed the door, ushering Travis around to the other side. "We should probably hurry... you look a little feverish."

"Alright... thank you, Mr. Yoshi..."

Laura didn't make it to the hospital; she was asleep the moment the squad car turned onto the road. Travis had taken the seat beside her, one hand secured the luke warm cup of hot chocolate while the other steadied her as she dozed off, her head lolling onto his shoulder. It was a silent night; tomorrow Laura would realize what had passed between her and Travis. And no doubt, she would throw a hissy fit to the only person she could truly confide in (Kana) about the fact that in their one moment of truly, perfectly romanticized solitude, her only thing to say to her crush was "Is \_Roberto\_ okay?", all from a hospital bed.

Roberto, as it so happened, took a few days to fully recover from fatigue and dehydration. He was a \_lot\_ \_worse\_ off than Laura as it turned out... she couldn't help but feel a little grateful towards him. Once he returned he was allowed to return to the soccer team. They made an 'exception' in his case, for his 'courage and perseverance' in a difficult situation. Obviously he had earned it. And in the end, the truth about his cousin was never uncovered. It was his and Laura's little secret...

But until then things were silent. Laura, quietly huddled against her crush of a lifetime, a small smile playing on her face, seemed at peace. And for the first time in a long time... the locket that had been around her neck for weeks on end now dangled outside of her collar, untouched.

\* \* \*

>Whoo, that one over. So... looks like Travis may have an eye for Laura after all? And Roberto's being stubborn, as usual...<p><p>

Only a chapter or two more to go. Have a fair idea of how this'll wrap up in the end. Review please, amigos.

End  
file.